Protestants Against Hitler: A Comparative Study

of Martin Niemöller, Karl Barth,
and Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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by

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Totalitarianism, by its very nature, attempts to subjugate any idea, institution, or power that does not harmonize with the state ideology. Everything--art, literature, music, labor movements, even religion--must conform to a rigorous straitjacket of standards or risk certain elimination. In Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler effected his control of the state through a merciless coordination process known as Gleichschaltung. For the most part, Hitler was successful in ridding Germany of his political and cultural foes. Political parties were outlawed by the Enabling Act of March 1933; labor unions were assimilated into the German Labor Front. Innovative musicians and artists, denounced as Bolshevists who were ruining "German" culture, were forced in droves out of the country. Leftist opponents, Jews, and other "degenerates" who did not fit the pure Aryan ideal were extirpated. In effect, Hitler attempted to revolutionize German society through this coordination process, with the ultimate goal of "ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer."

One group, however, proved to be unusually recalcitrant: those church elements united in their disapproval of Nazi racial policies and in their desire to avoid incorporation into the state machinery. In particular, Protestants who espoused these beliefs and formed the Confessing Church were among the most courageous resisters to the Hitler regime. Rather than retreat into a shamed silence, they chose to defend the spiritual integrity of
traditional Christianity against the intrusions of National Socialist dogma. One scholar commented:

In all of Nazi Germany it was only mainline Protestants, drawing on the capital of four centuries, who comprised an elite able and strong enough to resist the new order. The evangelical religionist combined education, knowledge, special skills, and a firm select position in German culture...Indeed, all significant resistance to the regime was tied to the ability of the Protestant elite to maintain and reconstitute itself in face of Nazi attempts to destroy it and usurp its prerogatives.

If the Confessing Church was partly successful in resisting Nazi infiltration, it is also true that it was to some degree quite ineffectual in presenting a consistently solid bulwark of resistance to Hitler. More often than not, the church found itself rent by serious disputes that greatly hampered positive action of any kind. A wide gamut of church leaders disputed issues concerning the proper relation between church and state, the plight of Jews, and whether authority should be obeyed in all circumstances. Only in rare instances, such as the famous Barmen synod, did these Protestants show true unanimity. For the most part, the history of the Confessing Church was a disjointed one. United by their concern about the church's fate under National Socialism, church leaders had a harder time agreeing on the specifics of opposition and the proper role of the Christian in a hostile environment.

In attempting to show the diversity of participants who made up the Confessing Church, three prominent figures--
Martin Niemöller, Karl Barth, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer—have been selected for analysis. This approach has an advantage in that it gives personal, concrete perspectives that are more readily grasped than the often confusing, constantly changing actions of the church as a whole. Although these three leaders were among the most outspoken against National Socialism, they reached their decision to resist in entirely different ways. Niemöller, a nationalist and former submarine commander, welcomed Hitler's advent and only gradually realized the threat the new order posed to the church. Barth's decision to oppose Hitler stemmed from both theological rejection of Nazi doctrine and from left-wing sympathy. Bonhoeffer, seeing his beloved Germany ruined by the Nazis, entered a political conspiracy that would eventually claim his life.

Using histories of the church struggle, biographies, writings, and essays, three issues are examined: (1) National Socialism. How did each person view Hitler and National Socialism? How was he politically predisposed to accept or reject the new order? What events in his life highlighted his rejection of National Socialism? (2) The Jewish question. How did each person regard the treatment of Jews? Did he make a public defense of Jews? What actual aid did he provide? (3) Resistance. How did each person justify resistance from both a theological and personal perspective? What actual measures were taken to combat Hitler? Undoubtedly, these questions
were crucial ones for those torn between love of country and sense of Christian responsibility. As one will discover, these matters were not easily resolved by church leaders.
A Brief Survey of the Church Struggle

In order to set the stage for the ensuing discussion, as well as to provide some clarification of terminology, a brief discussion of the crucial forces and events of the church struggle is needed. A detailed analysis of the Kirchenkampf is not necessary here; essentially, relations between church and state can be seen in two phases: (1) attempts of pro-Nazi groups to win control of the church, and (2) the state's use of force to insure conformity and to destroy the church's capacity to resist.

In 1932, Joachim Hossenfelder formed an organization that called on Protestants to rally around the National Socialist platform. Known as the German Christian Faith Movement, this group attempted to apply Nazi principles to traditional Protestant doctrine. German Christians welcomed the proposed unification of disparate Protestant elements into one Reich Church; this unification would be compatible with the leadership principle (Führerprinzip). In addition, they insisted upon the church's acceptance of the Aryan Clause, a discriminatory policy which would have dismissed all persons of Jewish ancestry from the clergy.

During the first half of 1933, the German Christian Movement gained considerable ground. During the constitutional convention of the new German Evangelical Church, Ludwig Müller, an associate of Hitler and adviser to the German Christians, proposed his own name for the title of Reich Bishop. Instead, a moderate named Friedrich von
Bodelschwingh was elected. This incident galvanized the German Christians, who contested the legality of the elections and harassed Bodelschwingh into resigning after a brief four-week term of office. In the regional synod elections of July 1933, the German Christians won a smashing victory, capturing three-fourths of the seats. Two months later, at the national synod held at Wittenberg, the German Christians crowned their success by electing Müller as Reich Bishop.

An incident in November 1933, however, soon rendered irreparable damage to the movement. Speaking in the Berlin Sportspalast to a capacity crowd of 20,000, Dr. Reinhold Krause shocked the audience with his vituperation of the Old Testament. Calling the book a collection of "stories of cattle dealers and pimps," Krause proclaimed it to be "one of the most questionable books in the world's history." Response to Krause's oration was immediate and severe; thousands of moderate German Christians resigned their memberships. Müller, too, was to find his authority tarnished by the incident. Wishing to avoid further trouble, Hitler withdrew his support from the German Christian Movement and endorsed a "hands-off" policy in regard to church matters.

Meanwhile, Protestant opposition to Hitler began to coalesce. At first, resistance to National Socialism was endemic and badly organized, but through organizations such as the Young Reformers' Movement opposition began to be heard. The first broadly-based protest group was the
Pastors' Emergency League. Formed by Niemöller in September 1933, this group pledged to adhere to the tenets of the Reformation; heresies such as the Aryan Clause were rejected. Disgust with strident German Christian practices caused membership in Niemoller's organization to expand rapidly. At its peak, over seven thousand pastors held memberships.

Two important meetings were held in 1934 that created a significant, albeit temporary unity in Protestant opposition. The birth of the Confessing Church is usually considered to be the Barmen Synod of May 1934. Here delegates rejected the heresies of National Socialism and proclaimed the Confessing Church to be the true Evangelical Church of Germany. In October 1934, at Berlin-Dahlem, the Confessing Church established a Reich Brotherhood Council to govern its affairs. Peter Matheson commented, "It appears to be the sole example of a major public body being established after 1933 against the wishes of state and party." The unity proved to be illusory, however, and would soon disintegrate in the face of internal disagreements and external coercion.

Dismayed by the failure of the German Christians and by Müller's inability to bring peace to the Evangelical Church, the Nazis introduced new measures to subdue recalcitrant Protestants. In 1935, the Ministry for Church Affairs was established. Headed by Hans Kerrl, this organization authorized the formation of committees
comprised of German Christians, Confessing Church members, and state officials. Although these committees were ostensibly created to iron out major differences, church leaders realized the advantageous position the Nazis would hold. The more conservative elements of the Confessing Church, mainly Lutherans who perceived resistance to the state as contrary to God's will, reluctantly began to cooperate with the Nazis. The more radical "Barmen-Dahlem wing" refused to have anything to do with such committees. As a result, hostilities surfaced and the leadership of the church began to pull apart.

Under the Kerrl ministry, intransigent pastors were harassed and jailed in greater numbers. Barth was forced out of Germany in 1935; Niemoller was imprisoned two years later. Severe restrictions and new stipulations were added. In 1937, Dr. Friedrich Werner became Director of the German Evangelical Church Chancellory, a post that wielded considerable power over church affairs. In an audacious move, Werner insisted on having all pastors swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler. Amazingly, the Confessing Church agreed to such a measure, wishing only to add minor stipulations. The embarrassment of the church was extreme when Martin Bormann revealed that such oaths were voluntary. Even a moderate call for peace issued by the leadership of the Confessing Church during the Munich Crisis was denounced as the work of traitors. It became increasingly
clear that the Confessing Church was losing any semblance of significance. Indeed, with its leadership silenced or imprisoned, and its activities under constant scrutiny, the Confessing Church could put up only token resistance during the remaining years of the Third Reich.

The events that transpired as Hitler came to power forced Protestants to make crucial decisions. Years of complacency and lethargy, fostered by a comfortable relationship between church and state, were now over. Indeed, men such as Barth, Niemöller, and Bonhoeffer never imagined that they would have to sacrifice pastorates and theological posts to confront an upstart political order. How they reacted to the events of the Kirchenkampf and what they perceived as their own responsibilities will be dealt with in the next three sections of this paper.
MARTIN NIEMÖLLER

Karl Barth once said of Martin Niemöller, "he embodies the Evangelical Church, with its distinctive approach and for all its limitations as an opponent of National Socialism.... There is an abundance of less well-known figures and less familiar names about which the same thing can be said. But Niemöller was the most outstanding of them all, and became to some extent a symbol." ¹ Barth's laudatory remarks are an apposite description of this Westphalian pastor, who emerged from relative obscurity to lead the church struggle against the machinations of the National Socialists. Yet Niemöller has often been the center of controversy, especially among those who find it difficult to reconcile his ardent German nationalism, similar to that of the Nazis in many respects, with his mission in the church. An examination of this Confessing Church leader is a key to understanding the complexity of the church struggle, for the beliefs Niemöller held were shared by many Protestant church leaders and the laity itself.

The son of a small-town pastor, Niemöller was exposed to both the Gospel and a strong dose of German patriotism. In fact, one of his father's recollections was hearing Kaiser Wilhelm II speak on the necessity of adhering to the Gospel and the mission of "our beloved Evangelical Church."² It was this respect for church and state, coupled with a longing for the sea, that led
Niemoller to the Flensburg-Mürwik Naval Training College in 1910. Achieving success as a cadet, Niemöller was assigned to active duty two years later. With the outbreak of World War I, he served aboard the battleship Thüringen, seeing limited action. Wishing to become more involved in the war effort, Niemöller applied for a transfer and was appointed for submarine duty in October 1915. His first assignment was as junior officer aboard an old, untrustworthy submarine, the U-72; his leadership ability quickly asserted itself, and by the end of the war, Niemoller commanded his own vessel, the U-67.

The war, however, proved to be a turning point in his own outlook on life. In his autobiography, From U-Boat to Pulpit, he recounted an incident when his submarine, having successfully torpedoed a French ship, began firing on the escorts that attempted to rescue surviving sailors. This act of "spiritual bankruptcy" troubled Niemoller greatly, and he found himself questioning its justification in terms of his own faith. He remarked, "this incident was the turning point in my life because it opened my eyes to the utter impossibility of a moral universe."

The disintegration of traditional life in Germany was a source of bitterness and discouragement to Niemoller. In an effort to "remain as far apart as the poles from the wirepullers of this revolution," he seriously considered the idea of emigrating to Argentina; his uncle was able to dissuade him from this course of action and directed him toward the possibility of farming in Westphalia. The skyrocketing inflation, however, wiped out
Niemöller's pension and prevented him from buying land. Even worse, he was forced to desperate measures to keep himself and his family alive. After considering a number of other occupations, Niemöller turned to the church. He believed that "the fate of the nation depended on family life, its schools, and its church as sources of inspiration for its people," and soon decided to enter the ministry. He enthusiastically began his studies at Munster University in 1920. Paying for his education through sale of his war memorabilia, and through a large gift from his brother-in-law, Niemöller was able to complete his studies by 1923. Yet as a curate to a pastor, he was barely able to provide a subsistence living for his family; it was through fortuitous connections that he was named to head the Westphalian Home Mission, a social welfare arm of the Evangelical Church. He served for eight years, initiating several new programs. In 1931, he became associate pastor, and, shortly afterwards, pastor of St. Anne's Church in Berlin-Dahlem. In the well-to-do suburb Niemöller first confronted the emerging National Socialist ideology and the subsequent Kirchenkampf. Soon, the contentment Niemöller found at St. Anne's would be traded for the oppressions of the Nazis. Hence it is necessary to examine more closely at this point both Niemöller and the struggles he faced during Hitler's reign.

Assembling a totally satisfactory portrait of Niemöller can be a trying experience. Unlike his contemporaries Barth and
Bonhoeffer, Niemöller did not write extensively; much of his thought must be gleaned from sermons and public statements. Furthermore, the English biographies of Niemöller currently available (works by Dietmar Schmidt and Clarissa Start Davidson) are more descriptive than analytical, and have an unfortunate tendency to gloss over the more enigmatic features of Niemöller's character. But, using Niemöller's limited writings, these biographies, and other books on the church struggle, it is nevertheless possible to explain Niemöller and his views on National Socialism, the Jewish question, and resistance to the Hitler regime.

**Niemöller and National Socialism**

Perhaps more confusion has resulted from Niemöller's stance on National Socialism than from any other issue. Many claim that Niemöller was in sympathy with Hitler's plans, and that his opposition to Hitler was intended to prevent the power of the church from being usurped by the Nazis rather than to uphold deep religious convictions. A particularly infamous press conference at the end of World War II gave impetus to many of these charges, mainly due to the fact that Niemöller answered questions in such a way as to suggest that he combatted Hitler for "religious reasons" and that his treatment in prison had been exemplary. When one examines Niemöller more closely, however, one realizes how far apart he stood from the diabolical plans of National Socialism. To reach this realization, one must distinguish the
totalitarian practices of Nazism from Niemöller's nationalism and concern for the sanctity of the church and Gospel.

An understanding of Niemöller's initial attraction to National Socialism requires an examination of his background. An ideal place to start is his autobiographical sketch, *From U-Boat to Pulpit*, which elucidates his nationalistic fervor. From a historical perspective as well, the book details the hardships of the early 1920's and the bitterness that Niemöller and his fellow countrymen experienced.

Like many Germans in November, 1918, Niemöller was mystified and shocked at the sudden collapse of the German state. He had realized that the war was nearing its conclusion, but he expected "an end which we could never imagine to be anything but a happy and bearable issue for Germany."9 Searching for answers to explain the demise of his beloved state, he concluded that "this critical time was chosen by the German people to indulge in a suicidal orgy of internal strife."10 Niemöller, believing as many people did, adhered to the notion that Germany had been betrayed by enemies within.

Increasingly despondent over the future of the German nation, Niemöller removed himself from active participation in his country's affairs. He openly disdained the Versailles "Peace Treaty," as he referred to it,11 and refused to reconcile himself with the Weimar government. Niemöller was genuinely concerned about the peril of communist revolution; at one time
he considered joining the Freikorps to combat this leftist threat. In 1920, while a student at Münster University, he organized and commanded a battalion of troops with the intent of quashing the red troops creating trouble during the Kapp Putsch. In his description of the incident, Niemöller noted that "we were greeted on all sides as liberators from the hell of bolshevism...the behavior of the Spartacists had been shocking." Although the threat dissipated within a few weeks, Niemöller remained active in a German national student movement, devoting to it much of his time. But Niemöller often brooded about the fate of Germany in the tumultuous Weimar era, doubting whether Germany had the leadership and resolve to emerge as a cohesive nation.

In this light, then, one may more readily understand his possible attraction to National Socialism. In examining the works of several authors, one finds four points consistently emerging as reasons why Hitler gave hope to discouraged Germans such as Niemöller: (1) the Nazis, with their vehement obloquy of Versailles, Weimar, and the "criminals" of 1918, would remove the stigma of defeat and would replace the paralysis of Weimar government with strong leadership, (2) outspoken in their opposition to the left, the Nazis would be an ideal vanguard against communism, (3) Article 24 of the National Socialist platform promoted "positive Christianity," which was construed to be support for the existence of the church, and (4) the formal separation of church and state initiated by the Weimar government was anathema.
to many church leaders, who believed the Nazis would restore the prerogatives the church enjoyed under the monarchy.

Indeed, Niemoller did regard the Nazis in favorable terms. It was commonly believed the Niemoller had joined the Nazi party during the 1920's (he later refuted this claim, but declared that he had voted for Hitler in 1924 and 1928); nor was he averse to giving the Nazi salute in public. And Hitler gave him little cause for doubt; he declared in his first public address as chancellor that "the national government... will offer strong protection to Christianity as the basis for our collective morality." Furthermore, there seems to have been considerable word-of-mouth testimony concerning Hitler's own religiosity. It was commonly believed, for instance, that the Führer carried a copy of the New Testament with him at all times.

Ever gradually, however, the faith that Niemöller placed in the Nazis began to erode. Perhaps his first instance of consternation came in 1932 with his contact with the nascent German Christian movement. Their blatant demands for racial purity and Nazi doctrine to supplement traditional Christianity distressed Niemöller. Yet he probably regarded this group as taking an extremist position, not truly representative of National Socialism. The serious implications of the group's actions were not driven home until the church elections the following year. The German Christians, touting slogans such as "We are the SA of Jesus
Christ,"\(^{16}\) and "Sieg heil to Jesus Christ!"\(^{17}\) gained impressive momentum. Niemöller attempted to combat their influence by supporting the Young Reformers' Movement and its "Gospel and Church" platform, and he also wrote tracts exposing the dangers of the German Christians. But Niemöller's efforts were too little and came too late. A personal appeal by the Führer, as well as his opposition's access to the Nazi propaganda machine, insured victory. The July 23, 1933, elections resulted in a landslide, with German Christians seizing over three-fourths of regional synod representation. It was increasingly apparent to Niemöller that, instead of restoring the church, National Socialism intended to absorb it.

Niemöller's next effort to stem the tide of this heretical Christianity was the formation of the Pastors' Emergency League. The galvanizing factor in its organization was the passage of the Aryan paragraph in the Old Prussian Synod. Niemöller believed it was necessary for the opposition to become organized more effectively than had hitherto been attempted. On September 21, 1933, Niemöller mailed to several thousand pastors a four-point pledge which urged them to adhere to the Scriptures and the confessions of the Reformation; it also called for the rejection of the Aryan Clause. The response to the circular was overwhelming; by the end of the year membership exceeded 6000. This massive rejection of the spate of National Socialist doctrine was a key factor in preventing the Aryan Clause from being adopted by the National Synod at Wittenberg.
In all probability, Niemöller's last hope for reconciliation was dashed in a meeting between church leaders and Hitler in January 1934. From many accounts, it appears that until this event Niemöller believed that Hitler was not truly aware of the situation and, once informed, would rectify the injustice created by the German Christians. As late as October 1933, Niemöller's support of Hitler was still strong, as a message sent to the Führer upon Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations shows:

> In this decisive hour for folk and fatherland we greet our Führer. We give thanks for this manly deed and the clear words that safeguard Germany's honor. In the name of 2500 Evangelical pastors who do not belong to the German Christian Faith Movement, we pledge our true support and prayerful thoughts.18

The purpose of Niemöller's meeting with Hitler was to iron out major differences between the Nazi-backed Reichbishop Ludwig Müller and major Evangelical Church leaders; as head of the Pastor's Emergency League, Niemöller held a position associated with the more traditional church. Just as the meeting commenced, Hermann Göring burst into the room and announced to Hitler that a telephone conversation between Niemöller and another pastor revealed the former's complicity in an assassination plot to dispose of the Führer. Apparently, and accounts of this incident conflict, Niemöller or his secretary had jokingly commented on Paul von Hindenburg's influence on Hitler, stating that the venerated president was going to administer last rites to him.
Outraged, Hitler launched a long tirade castigating Niemöller and his church associates for their continuous strife and disloyalty to the German people. As the meeting was drawing to a close, Niemöller reportedly stated boldly that he, too, had a responsibility to the German people and that neither Hitler nor anyone else could take it away. It has been said that this audacious response was one of such rarity that Hitler probably never forgot it.

After this disheartening experience, Niemöller grew increasingly intransigent toward the Nazis. His sermons became more militant in their defiance of National Socialist practices. For instance, in the week following the SA purge, Niemöller read the Ten Commandments in place of the traditional liturgy, pausing significantly after the words, "Thou shalt not kill." He also refused to cooperate with Hans Kerrl, Minister of Church Affairs, in the latter's effort to impose totalitarian control on the Evangelical church. Of course, the Nazis extracted a toll for his opposition: his activities were scrutinized by the Gestapo; his house was bombed and ransacked; he was arrested from time to time; and he was banned from preaching. In July 1937 the former war hero and esteemed patriot was arrested on charges of high treason. He would not see freedom until his liberation eight years later.

If National Socialism had made no other pretense than a desire for political control, it is doubtful that Niemöller
would have played any role of resistance. Essentially, the former submarine commander shared the nationalistic aspirations of the Nazis. But when the new order threatened the authority of the Evangelical church, perverted the Gospel, and destroyed the sanctity of the individual, Niemöller painfully realized that all similarities ended there. He felt no other recourse than to oppose the new order for the sake of a higher one.

Niemöller and the Jewish Question

Often considered a troubling point in evaluating the character of Niemöller was his attitude toward Jews. Perhaps much of the confusion results from the fact that contradictory and inconclusive evidence clouds the picture. One can say with reasonable certainty that Niemöller was not a rabid anti-Semite in the National Socialist manner, but, in his own words, he considered himself "anything but a philo-Semite." His own actions toward the Jews were riddled with ambiguity and could be described as lukewarm at best.

First of all, it should be emphasized that anti-Semitism was not an uncommon characteristic of Germans. Branding the Jews as an inferior, troublesome race was not a new concept that Hitler inculcated in the minds of the people; the latent tendency toward anti-Semitism had been present for centuries. Stories of Jewish greed and economic manipulation, as well as those associating the Jews with the events of 1918 and the emergence of the Weimar Republic, were commonly accepted as truth. Pastor Franz Hildebrandt, an associate serving with Niemöller at Dahlem,
believed that Niemöller may have practiced a conventional sort of anti-Semitism, which condoned social aloofness and discouraged intermarriage. Considering the traditional characteristics of Niemöller's background, this statement appears to be plausible.

In a sermon entitled "Ye would not!" Niemöller gave a rare insight into his perception of the Jews, based on his own Christian beliefs. What is fascinating is Niemöller's comparison of the Jews' rejection of Christ with characteristics of National Socialism:

We see a highly gifted people [the Jews] which produces idea after idea for the benefit of the world, but whatever it takes up becomes poisoned, and all that it ever reaps is contempt and hatred because ever and anon the world notices the deception and avenges itself in its own way. Later, he adds,

I cannot help saying quite harshly and bluntly that the Jewish people came to grief and disgrace because of its positive Christianity.... It bears a curse because it rejected him and resisted him when it became clear that Jesus of Nazareth would not cease calling to repentance and faith, despite their insistence that they...belonged to a pure blooded, race-conscious nation. Other parts of this sermon indicate that Niemöller espoused an attitude that the Jews were responsible for their plight, and there was nothing that could be done to mitigate God's judgment. Given his own Christian perspective, this sort of fatalism may explain Niemöller's half-hearted desire to help the Jews.

On the positive side, one finds instances of Niemöller's compassion for the Jews. One of the more prominent pieces of evidence involves point four of the pledge of the Pastors'
Emergency League, which declared that the Aryan Clause was a violation of a Christian confessional stand. Arthur C. Cochrane believes that the reason behind Niemoller's inclusion of this important point was his realization that "Antisemitism struck a blow at the heart of the Christian faith.... It was a recognition of the indissoluble unity of Israel and the Church, of Jews and Christians."²⁷ Hildebrandt, himself of Jewish origin, concurs:

"When it became a question of treating Jews as second-class citizens, of taking their jobs, property, lives, he came to their defense and fearlessly so."²⁸ Hildebrandt, who at one time was serving in England with Bonhoeffer, was summoned back to Germany by Niemöller. Despite the increasingly hostile atmosphere toward Jews, "Niemöller showed his contempt for the anti-Semitic views of the Nazis...in demanding that I come back..."²⁹ Another consideration in weighing the evidence is the substantial sums of money Niemöller solicited, much of which was earmarked for aiding Jewish families; a Gestapo raid on Niemöller's home after his imprisonment had been conducted because of rumors that his family had been storing provisions for Jews.³⁰

Some evidence remains, however, to support an opposite view. Bonhoeffer's biographer, Eberhard Bethge, claims that Niemöller was hesitant about a binding rejection of the Aryan Clause, wishing to leave it as a matter of individual conscience.³¹ Bethge also states that "Niemöller admitted the possibility of reconciling
the exclusion of Jewish Christians with I Cor. 8 and the concep-
tion of the weaker brethren." And, after the war, at least one Jewish rabbi protested against Niemöller's visit to the United States, claiming he was still in sympathy with the anti-Semitism of the Nazis. Moreover, a further demonstration of this ambivalence toward the Jews can be seen in a comparison with Barth and Bonhöffer. Both of his two contemporaries found anti-Semitism offensive to the nature of Christianity and unflinchingly voiced their protests in several writings and conversations. In contrast, one can find very little evidence of any significant protest in Niemöller's sermons or dialogues against Hitler's ruthless treatment of Jews. Niemöller's silence could be interpreted as hesitation, lack of concern, or both.

Reaching a conclusion about Niemoller's convictions on the Jewish question is not an easy task. The lack of conclusive evidence further complicates matters, and answers based on extrapolation may fail to do justice to Niemöller. But one may venture to say that Niemöller's particular difficulty lay in a deep-rooted clash of traditional and Christian values. On the one hand, Niemoller shared with his countrymen a mistrust of Jews that condoned anti-Semitic practices. His faith, on the other hand, caused him to perceive the need of demonstrating the love of Christ to his persecuted brethren, even though he would rather have avoided that obligation.
Niemöller and Resistance

Niemöller probably never imagined that his first protests against the revolting practices of the German Christians would thrust him into the role of a leader of the resistance to Nazism. Certainly his initial loyalty to Hitler and the new order made any such opposition seem unlikely. But as more timid Protestants began to toe the Nazi line, Niemöller became a central figure in the shrinking core of resisters, and would become an ever-present thorn in the side of the National Socialists who wished to subjugate the church.

One point that is repeatedly stressed by some authors is that Niemöller's resistance was never political in the sense that it tried to overthrow the government. Frederick Bonkovsky perceives Niemöller's resistance as part of a power struggle between the Gleichschaltung precepts of the Nazis and the "Throne and Altar" tradition of German Protestants, which stressed a strong, independent church working in a close relationship with the state. When the Nazis attempted to destroy the realm of the church's traditional power, the Protestants sought to protect their domain. Certainly the pledge Niemöller wrote for the Pastors' Emergency League said nothing about the illegitimacy of the state, nor did it encourage any kind of resistance to the Führer. And, as noted previously, many church leaders thought groups such as the German Christians were part of a lunatic fringe, overzealous in their devotion to Hitler.
At least initially, resistance such as Niemöller's was basically a rear-guard action, with Niemöller hoping that Hitler would soon restore the old system and ways.

As it became clear that the German Christian Movement's attempt to subvert the church from within was doomed to failure, the Nazis exerted external pressures to strangle traditional Christianity. The Ministry for Church Affairs, loyalty oaths to Hitler, and more frequent harrassment and arrest of church officials were manifestations of this policy. But as oppression became more overt, resistance became emboldened. Niemöller's most effective weapon during this period was his sermons. They were particularly anathema to the Nazis because they not only flatly rejected National Socialist dogma, but also found a receptive audience in the large numbers of people who came to hear him. An examination of his sermons reveals that Niemöller rarely, if ever, attacked the Nazis directly, but used Scripture to convey subtle yet unmistakable messages. One of his homilies, entitled "The Dumb Spake," clearly compares the Nazis to agents of Satan discussed in the New Testament. Other messages encourage members to rejoice in persecution and remain steadfast in their faith. Realizing the potential threat that these messages could stir, Reich Bishop Müller, and, later Krell as well, banned Niemöller from the pulpit on several occasions. Their efforts, however, often came to naught because of wide protest against their actions.
One special problem that constantly bedeviled the Nazis was the pastor's esteem and popularity. Unlike many of their opponents, the Nazis could not brand Niemöller as a Marxist or degenerate; his impeccable war record and right-wing sympathies gained him many admirers. And as Niemöller persisted in his opposition, the Nazis began to realize the danger he represented. Hans Gisevius commented:

For this reason his arrest in the middle of 1937 had a significance that went far beyond the conflict of the church. To my mind, Niemöller's incarceration removed the last personality around whom any sort of civilian revolt movement might have gathered. Indeed, on the day of his arrest, Niemöller's church was locked up, and a near riot resulted when parishioners refused to disperse as ordered. His trial eight months later was a viable demonstration of Niemöller's esteem; against three witnesses for the prosecution, Niemöller's lawyers had assembled over forty persons, including a sister of Hermann Göring, Ambassador Ulrich von Hassell, and Admiral Otto Schultz. The evidence favoring Niemöller was so lopsided that the charges of high treason were reduced to "abuse of the pulpit for political purposes." Niemöller received a light fine and was officially set free, scoring a short-lived triumph.

Upon hearing the verdict, Hitler was so outraged that he made Niemöller a personal prisoner. But even in the isolation of a concentration camp, he continued to be a troublesome individual for the Nazis. Numerous intercessory prayer services were held in his behalf in Germany and abroad, so much so that
he was thought to be the "most-prayed-for-man in history." Davidson claims that popular pressure prevented the Nazis from executing him. Also, his family was able to obtain improvements in his living conditions when stories of his mistreatment became rife. Niemöller stated after the war that, relatively speaking, he had been treated well. But even beyond that, Niemöller must have realized that public opinion saved his life.

One unusual incident should be examined. When war broke out in 1939, Niemöller requested that his commission in the navy be reactivated so that he might become part of the war effort. Although his offer was rejected by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, the incident was significant in that it created a furor in the Confessing Church and with leaders abroad. Many were convinced that Niemöller had sold out to the Nazis. Some authors speculated that one motive may have been a sense of duty to the fatherland, but others contend that it was an attempt to seek and enter some sort of political resistance, much in the same way that Bonhoeffer did. Bethge casts doubt on the conspiracy theory: "Niemoller later acknowledged that he would not have associated himself with Bonhoeffer's engagement in conspiracy, if he had been set free." Bethge also adds, "It was quite a usual thing for loyal confessing pastors to volunteer...so as to find a way out of a dangerous situation." Niemöller's curious act has never been explained satisfactorily and will likely continue to be a source of controversy.
Niemöller may have been a more integral part of the resistance than even he realized. His outspokenness and unquestionable integrity were a source of encouragement to disheartened Christians. Add to that his status as war hero, and one can perceive the difficulties the Nazis had in silencing the resolute pastor. Although reluctant to fight for anything outside the realm of the church, he gradually realized the threat that National Socialism's very existence posed. In the words of Ernst Helmreich, Niemöller realized "that in a totalitarian state all opposition in the end becomes political opposition." 43

In the final evaluation, Niemöller remains an elusive figure. His belated rejection of National Socialism and ambivalence toward Jews remain puzzling features. Part of the enigma can be explained by his desire to see Germany restored as a unified nation and a world power—a desire that blinded him to the uglier features of the new order. Undoubtedly, Niemöller confused and misled his followers with his antagonism toward Nazi intrusion into church affairs, which contrasted sharply with his approval of Hitler's foreign policy and the remilitarization of Germany. Ultimately, though, Niemöller felt obligated to shelve his nationalistic ideals to defend spiritual ones. Indeed, Niemöller's opposition to Hitler was a tremendous benefit to the Confessing Church, for it sorely needed his esteem as war hero and his blunt criticism of Nazi injustices to encourage more timid believers.
A full discussion of the significance of Karl Barth may not be limited to the *Kirchenkampf*. As perhaps the most influential theologian of the twentieth century, Barth rebelled against decades of liberal theology that had dominated European thought. In the political realm, too, Barth's views on nuclear armament and co-existence with communism stirred controversy in the Cold War era. But it was in the confrontation between the Confession Church and National Socialism that Barth emerged as an uncompromising leader. As the leading intellectual force behind church elements opposing Hitler, Barth combined straightforward declarations of Christian purpose with a total rejection of the encroachments of National Socialism. His outspokenness at times posed substantial risk; many church leaders considered him a threat to their own existence. Yet Barth was of inestimable value to the Confessing Church, for his own determined opposition galvanized a fragmented church resistance.

Barth was born into a Swiss family steeped in religious tradition. His father, Fritz Barth, was a Reformed minister and university lecturer at Bern; several other ancestors had also served as pastors. As a youth, Karl demonstrated a proclivity for history, military matters, and drama. At the age of eighteen, he began his theological studies at the University of Bern. Here he came under the influence of liberal
theologians, most notably Adolf von Harnack, Hermann Gunkel, and Wilhelm Herrmann. Barth read their works avidly and identified himself with their thought.

Following his ordination, Barth became pastor at Safenwil, a small Swiss village. Eberhard Busch, Barth's biographer, believes that the new minister was not especially popular despite his earnest efforts to draw new members. Part of the reason for his unpopularity was undoubtedly his involvement with labor movements. Barth's sympathy for the workers and his stands on social issues earned him the sobriquet of "the red pastor." One member of his congregation, an industrialist, left the church because of the pastor's political meddling. Barth even considered joining the Social Democratic Party, but demurred because of his clerical status.

World War I was a shattering blow to Barth. An avowed pacifist, he was greatly disillusioned by the disintegration of workers' and socialists' cohesion and the failure to resist the outbreak of war. Even more appalling to Barth was a statement issued by ninety-three theologians, among them Harnack and Herrmann, which pledged them to support the Kaiser's war effort. Comparing their actions to a "twilight of the gods," Barth thought his former teachers to have been "hopelessly compromised by what he regarded as their failure in the face of the ideology of the war." Deeply troubled, Barth was forced to re-examine his entire system of beliefs and
began a serious study of the Bible. During this time, he also joined the Social Democrats despite their earlier failures, hoping to add his leadership to the rebuilding of a cohesive party.

In 1919, Barth completed a book that "landed like a bombshell in the playground of the theologians." The book, an elaborate commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans (Der Romerbrief) was revolutionary in its rejection of nineteenth-century theological thought. The chaos of the First World War had revealed the futility of liberal theology, with its emphasis on man's capabilities and rationalism. In Der Romerbrief, Barth stressed the "wholly otherness of God" and the impossibility of placing Him in straitjackets of human thought. What was needed, Barth believed, was a return to the word of God as the sole source of guidance. Barth's commentary was an overnight sensation, especially in Germany, and brought a great deal of acclaim and much controversy to the young Swiss pastor.

Largely because of Der Romerbrief's reputation, Barth was offered a faculty chair at the University of Gottingen; the offer was highly unusual in that Barth did not have a doctoral degree. Despite enormous pressures, Barth succeeded in his work. This period in Barth's life was also extremely fruitful. The second edition of Der Romerbrief was completed. In conjunction with theologians such as Eduard Thurneyson and
Rudolf Bultmann, Barth formed the Dialectic School of theology and began the influential publication *Zwischen den Zeiten* (Between the Times). In 1925, Barth was appointed to the University of Münster, and five years later became a Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Bonn. A very short time would elapse before Barth would be confronted with the emerging National Socialist state; it is here that the story of Barth's involvement in the church struggle begins in earnest. The finest account of Barth's role during the Nazi era is Busch's biography *Karl Barth*. Other works on Barth present biographical sketches that can be useful at times, but their thrust is largely limited to theological matters. A collection of his writings entitled *The German Church Conflict* is valuable in discerning his perceptions of Nazism and the mission of the church. There are also general writings on the *Kirchenkampf* which place Barth's role in perspective. Using these works, one can assess Barth's outlook on National Socialism, the Jewish question, and resistance.

**Barth and National Socialism**

An outspoken enemy of National Socialism from the very start, Barth demonstrated none of the vacillation that characterized Niemöller. His writings and speeches conveyed his conviction that the church should have nothing to do with Hitler's new order. It is no wonder, then, that the Nazis
regarded "Barthian prose...as one of the worst kinds of anti-Nazi literature." Barth's candor and keen perceptions minced few words and made even fewer people comfortable. Few would deny the importance of his early diagnosis of Hitler's deceit. and his courage in proclaiming his thoughts publicly.

Clarence Abercrombie said of Barth, "He hated to be penned down--especially in his politics. And indeed it is difficult to get a solid grip on the man." Although Abercrombie's statement contains a great deal of truth when one surveys Barth's life, it is also true that Barth displayed a good deal of consistency in political endeavors, especially during the era of the Third Reich. It is therefore possible to make some general statements on Barth's conflict with the Nazis. Such statements concern (1) his early rejection of National Socialism, (2) his recognition of its totalitarian features, (3) his comments on its religious nature, (4) his identification of Nazism with liberal theology, and (5) his personal left-wing political rejection.

First of all, it is apparent that Barth rejected the National Socialist ideology from his very first encounters with it. Witnessing the Nazis' emergence during the 1920's, Barth commented that their ideas and leadership were "absurd," but later regretted not warning others concerning the course on which Germany was headed. An article appeared in a Zurich newspaper in 1931, in which he described the dangers of fascism.
In general, however, Barth did not become extensively concerned with the political realm until 1933. Hitler's appointment as chancellor riveted his attention and forced him to express his forebodings publicly. Statements Barth made following Hitler's appointment expressed his fear that National Socialism's aim was the eradication of Christianity. Many of Barth's influential tracts, the most important of which was Theologische Existenz heute, appeared in 1933; their publication came at a time when less circumspect colleagues still failed to realize the difference between the new totalitarian and old authoritarian orders.

Secondly, it can be implied that Barth fully understood the concept of a totalitarian state and the tactics employed to crush autonomous units of power within that state. His observations were unusually astute when juxtaposed with those of other church leaders who lacked Barth's political sophistication. In the summer of 1935, he wrote:

When National Socialism gained its long desired or feared power in Germany in the spring of 1933, it proved immediately to be a tyranny of previously unheard dimensions... There was at once no sphere of life on which it did not make demands... The political parties, commerce, administration, and justice, art, the universities... the press, public, and private welfare... have submitted to its demands, because they had to....

Two years later, in an article published in a Zurich newspaper, Barth described how the Nazis were methodically dismantling the church though suppressing channels of communication. Their intent, according to Barth, was "pursuing the plain object of
isolating the church so thoroughly and making it so superfluous that sooner or later the justification for its formal removal will seem evident." Barth was one of the few to perceive the ulterior motive to the unification of the Evangelical Church; he saw it as an attempt to impose the Führerprinzip. Closely related to Barth's totalitarian perception of National Socialism was his recognition of its quasi-religious qualities. In surveying Barth's writings and public statements, one notices his tendency to refer to the new order as a counter-religion and paganistic rite intended to supplant Christianity. As early as 1931, he ascribed to fascism religious characteristics, "with its deep-rooted, dogmatic ideas about one thing, national reality, and its appeal to foundations which are not foundations at all, and its emergence as sheer power." Barth also characterized National Socialism "without a doubt quite different from a political experiment. It is, namely, a religious institute of salvation." One also notices his description of Nazism as a new paganism: he makes numerous references to Hitler as a false god, and in one instance, likens those church leaders clamoring for the application of the Führerprinzip to priests of Baal. During the 1930's, many of Barth's sermons contained numerous references to the violation of the First Commandment, stressing that the Nazis were placing their own gods before the one true God.
National Socialism is also tied closely with the larger scheme of liberal theology, according to Barth. As discussed previously, Barth's 1919 commentary on Romans was a rejection of this liberal (or, as he referred to it, "neo-Protestant") theology of the nineteenth century. Interestingly enough, he linked National Socialism, and the German Christians in particular, with the latest manifestation of the theology and philosophical bankruptcy that had begun with Schleiermacher. Despite the obvious threat that National Socialism posed of totally transforming life, Barth believed that an even greater threat was the church's inability to recognize, much less resist, an enemy within its presence:

Indeed, even a complete "Tannenberg" of the German Christians, even a hundred percent political victory in the church by the opposition did not then understand the need to take hold of the roots of the malady in our church, which has only broken out amongst the German Christians, but which existed before them and is not confined to them.... It would have to be described as a downright national disaster if perhaps one neo-protestant hierarchy were to be replaced only by another of a somewhat lighter shade!  

This preoccupation with the larger theological battle is characteristic of Barth's earlier writings. His emphasis on a more contemporary, mundane account of the struggle occurred later when it became apparent that the Nazis would use their state apparatus to destroy the church.

Finally, it can be stated that Barth's left-wing sympathies were hardly compatible with the views of the Nazis. His early
pastoral work in Switzerland brought him into contact with workers; he was known for his sympathies with the Social Democrats. In 1931, Barth joined the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). It was reported that he joined the party more as a protest against right-wing violence than because of actual sympathies with its platform. His party affiliation was a source of irritation to the Nazis, who only grudgingly allowed him to continue teaching. Barth also had a high regard for democracy, which he considered to be compatible with the principles of Christianity. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that Barth was supportive of the Weimer Republic and expressed a hearty dislike for German nationalists, whom he described as "the most undesirable of all God's creatures whom I have ever met." Because Barth's political views were compatible with his theological objectives to National Socialism, he experienced none of the misgivings that would hamstring his colleagues, most of whom were oriented toward the right.

His early and forceful rejection of Hitler stems from the fact that he did not share common ground with the Nazi Weltanschauung.

In highlighting the chronology of Barth's struggle against National Socialism, one ideally begins with his seminal essay *Theologische Existenz heute* (Theological Existence Today). Although Barth had made several anti-Nazi statements that antedated this publication, this tract was widely circulated and propelled him into a leadership role. Barth wrote in
angry reaction to the resignation of Reich Bishop Bodelschwingh and the burgeoning influence of the German Christians. Urging the faithful to seek the word of God as sole authority, Barth launched a bitter attack on the German Christians' attempts to supplement the Gospel with notions of racial supremacy and anti-Semitism. The effect of this tract on church leaders and laity was immediate and tremendous. One of Barth's associates, Dr. Arthur Frey, likened the tract to an alarm call "as has probably not been heard in the Church since the Reformation." Barth himself thought that what he said in this tract had not differed from any previous statements, but that the situation and times had changed drastically. "Without my wanting it, or doing anything to facilitate it, this had of necessity to take on the character of a summons, a challenge, a battle cry, a confession."

Almost overnight, Barth became a leading figure in the opposition to the German Christians. In the church elections of July 1933, Barth was dismayed with the lack of resolution demonstrated by the Young Reformers' Movement, and at the last minute entered his own party, entitled "For the Freedom of the Gospel." In spite of its late entry, the party managed to obtain ten percent of Bonn's votes. But the German Christians carried the day, and with the appointment of Müller as Reich Bishop two months later, Barth resigned his position in the theological examination department of the Rhine consistory.
While continuing his lecturing and teaching at the University of Bonn, Barth was asked to draft a thesis for the proposed synod of the Confessing Church to be held at Barmen-Gemarke. In conjunction with two other pastors, whose roles were minimal, Barth wrote a six-article confession that for many defined the essence of the church's opposition to Hitler. Unequivocal in its language, the Barmen Confession repudiated the idea of National Socialism as a revelation of God, stressed the independence and integrity of the church, and the sovereignty of God. Unanimously approved by the synod, Barth's text was hailed as perhaps the most important confession in decades, even centuries. The uncompromising document had been the strongest rejection of National Socialist principles at that time.

Not surprisingly, Barth began to feel the pressure of increased surveillance and harassment. As early as January 1934, rumors of his imminent dismissal from Bonn began to circulate. It was thought that Barth's failure to give the Nazi salute before the beginning of class was placing him under increasing disapproval. Moreover, the more conservative elements of the Evangelical Church were wishing to placate Hitler with a more conciliatory attitude; Barth's hard-line approach was seen as a hindrance. Bishop August Mahrenholtz stated that Barth was in fact the greatest danger to the Evangelical Church. Accordingly, Barth was asked not to attend the Third Confessing
Synod of July 1935. The issue that finally forced Barth out of Germany was his refusal to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler. Since it was required of all state officials, Barth was prepared for dismissal at any time. The Provisional Church Government, however, came to his rescue with a declaration that all oaths were implicitly qualified because actions that were contrary to the will of God could not be carried out. With these stipulations, Barth felt that he could take the oath. The Nazis felt otherwise. Declared to be unfit as a teacher of German youth, Barth was dismissed from the Bonn faculty in December 1934. A few months later, he was banned from all public speaking. An appeal led to a reversal of the dismissal, but the Minister of Cultural Affairs permanently removed him from his position in June 1935.

Immediately, Barth returned to Switzerland and was offered a position in the University of Basel. From the relative security of this neutral nation, he continued his unrelenting attacks on National Socialism. Through a series of lectures, radio broadcasts, and a lively exchange of correspondence, Barth continued in his mission of awakening Europe to the danger of Hitler:

So it came about that despite my desires I had to persevere in my opposition to National Socialism even after I had returned to Switzerland for the preservation of the true church and the just state. On the account I am labeled a sort of "public enemy number one" in Germany, and must see all my writings put on the index of forbidden books.
Swiss officials did not greatly appreciate Barth's active political participation, for such activity conflicted with their desire to maintain strict neutrality. Barth's blunt public statements did little to alleviate the situation; one such remark blamed Hitlerism for increasing the German people's natural tendency toward paganism. The reaction to this comment was severe, as the German ambassador to Switzerland left in protest. Barth, however, always made a distinction between the German people and the Nazis; at the end of the war, he urged a conciliatory attitude toward a defeated Germany.

It is indeed fortunate that the Confessing Church had a man of Barth's stature. His astute perception of the nature of National Socialism was critical because church leaders did not perceive or chose to ignore the dangers. There were times when Barth must have considered himself to be a Cassandra, a voice crying in the wilderness. It was to the credit of Confessing church leaders that Barth was finally heeded; without his forcefulness, the Church might have become easy prey for the Nazis.

**Barth and the Jewish Question**

The avowedly racist policies of Third Reich appalled Barth. But, unlike the complacent individuals who tacitly supported or ignored this issue altogether, Barth saw the treatment of Jews as a major problem. In a nation where anti-Semitism had reached a frenzied stage, Barth unequivocally came to the Jews' defense.
As early as 1933, one finds rejections of the Aryan Clause and other racial standards in writings such as Theologische Existenz heute. Such findings indicate that Barth was fully predisposed toward helping the Jews rather early in the struggle. One lone dissenter from this view is Arthur C. Cochrane. He believes that Barth, caught up in the theological aspect of the struggle, perceived the Jewish problem as a symptom of the latest manifestation of the neo-Protestant malaise. Barth, accustomed to such anti-Semitic proclamations, addressed the plight of the Jews as a secondary issue. Not until the later horrors revealed the Nazi's intentions did Barth devote his attention to the Jews in a serious manner.

Barth always tied the Jewish question to the foundations of Christianity. He considered Jews to be members of the same family of God. In December 1933, Barth preached a sermon in which he discussed the fact that Jesus was a Jew, causing some members of the congregation to leave indignantly. Barth later wrote that "anyone who believes in Christ, who was himself a Jew, and died for Gentiles and Jews, simply cannot be involved in the contempt for Jews and ill-treatment of them which is now the order of the day". Busch states that Barth's main regret concerning the Barmen Confession was the omission of any statement on the Jews. And in the wake of the pogrom
known as Kristallnacht, Barth had harsh words and an admonition. Declaring anti-Semitism to be a sin against the Holy Spirit, he warned the churches that the "burning of synagogues was only the first step to treating the churches in the same way."

Finally, it must be stated that Barth did not provide mere lip service in aiding Jews. He was involved in Swiss groups such as the Society for Aid to the Confessional Church in Germany. Barth felt it was a Christian duty, as well as a testimony to Switzerland, to provide food, shelter, and clothing to Jewish émigrés. He wrote open letters to Swiss citizens as well, urging them to share in this duty.

Succinctly stated, Barth saw a two-fold purpose in aiding the Jews. One was a need for Christian compassion in a hostile environment, such as in Nazi Germany, or in a largely indifferent, complacent setting, as was the case in Switzerland. The second reason was the proximity and inseparable bonds that Barth perceived Judaism and Christianity as sharing. Barth realized that it was a short step from the eradication of the Old Testament to the elimination of traditional Christianity.

**Barth and Resistance**

During the late 1930's, as Europe moved closer to war, Barth began to advocate open political resistance to the Hitler regime. This position appeared to be anomalous with the pacifistic tendencies he exhibited during World War I. Yet
the extreme threat posed by Hitler led Barth to choose resistance as a countermeasure.

In the early phases of the struggle, Barth was not prone to make extremist proposals. Although quick to point out the obvious errors of Nazi-influenced groups, Barth was quite reluctant to suggest means of dealing with them. And, unlike more radical elements of the Confessing Church, Barth regarded talk of schism as irresponsible and insisted on reform from within. Although he openly objected to the Nazi political structure, nowhere in Barth's early writings are there references to political resistance. Occasionally, one comes across "resistance" used in a spiritual context, but hardly in a physical one.

By 1938, however, one finds Barth advocating a political dimension to his views on resistance. He regretted that his concentration on maintaining the theological purity of the church had caused him to neglect the consideration of political opposition. Barth increasingly saw such resistance as both a Christian duty and as a patriotic effort.

The theological underpinning of resistance was the complex notion of the Grenzfall, or "border case." Basically, Barth believed that governments were ordained by God, and should never be overthrown by revolution or unlawful means.
But in certain circumstances, action had to be taken against a government that had perverted its earthly purpose. Abercrombie presents one explanation:

As the body of Christ, the church is specifically charged by her Master to proclaim his Lordship, and she must not allow anything to conflict with this mission. Therefore, the church may be commanded by God to defend this message against strangulation by an unjust state.... If the state flies in the face of God's commands, it loses its divine commission, the base of its very existence; the state ceases to be a state at all.36

The Grenzfall was not a situation that could be verified by empirical formulas; the Christian must step out in faith if he believed the situation warranted. Thus, the Grenzfall was a subjective decision that always contained an element of uncertainty. Interestingly enough, Barth viewed the July 20, 1944, conspiracy against Hitler as not conforming to the conditions for a Grenzfall because of its failure. John Yoder sums up Barth's elaborate concept in this way: "He has simply found a name for the fact that in certain contexts he is convinced of the necessity of not acting according to the way God seems to have spoken in Christ."37

An open letter sent to Professor Josef Hromadka of Prague was the first significant manifestation of Barth's inclination toward political resistance. Written during the Sudetenland crisis, the letter urged the Czechs to take a stand. He declared, "Every Czech soldier who fights and suffers will do this for us--and I say this without reservation--he will also do
for the church of Jesus Christ. One thing, however, is certain; every possible human resistance must now be made at the borders of Czechoslovakia. Not surprisingly, the letter provoked a public outcry, especially in Germany. Barth's reputation was tarnished by the German press, which called him a warmonger, and by the Confessing Church, which publicly dissociated itself with his stance.

During the war years, Barth's resistance was expressed in a number of ways. First, there was the more conventional public lecture, a tool Barth used extensively in the earliest days of the war. In the first months of 1940, he lectured in several Dutch cities, declaring that war was necessary for the destruction of fanaticism emanating from Germany. Barth also made numerous radio broadcasts, including some on the BBC (which were banned in Switzerland). A more unconventional means of resistance was military service. In 1940, Barth enlisted in the Swiss Army, seeing limited duty and "keeping a lookout for Hitler's hellish hosts along the Rhine." Barth also belonged to a secret patriotic organization called the National Resistance Movement. Its purpose was to prepare Switzerland morally in case of invasion, and to facilitate military defense and combat defeatism once that invasion started.

Like so many others, Barth initially limited resistance to the spiritual realm. Defending the sanctity of the church from political intrusion was of utmost importance. But when
the church insisted on fighting no further than its own front yard, weakened by internal squabbling and oblivious to the plight of others, Barth must have realized the futility of such a position. National Socialism was obviously going to survive with or without such a church. Barth's decision on political resistance was undoubtedly a painful one, but one deemed necessary to stop a menace that threatened humanity.

Much has been said about what Barth did for the Confessing Church. But, as a final thought, one may consider what the church struggle did for him. Theodore Gill observes that "It was Adolf Hitler who saved Karl Barth's ethics by invading the sanctuary...." Indeed, the church struggle can be seen as a purifying experience for Barth. Having observed the failure of his own teachers during World War I, Barth realized that he too would be condemned if he failed to respond to the grave challenge of Hitler. All of his words about "dialectic theology" and the "word of God" would have been empty talk. The church struggle forced Barth from his ivory tower and into the midst of a severe test which challenged and refined his faith and from which he emerged triumphantly.
DIETRICH BONHÖPPER

From the earliest days of the National Socialist ascension to power up to the collapse of the Third Reich, resistance and conspiracy against Hitler's oppressive regime was manifested in a myriad of forms. Disgruntled industrialists, generals, and lawyers were to find themselves joined for the clandestine purpose of assassinating the Führer and coming to favorable terms with the Allies. Yet it seems almost anomalous to discover that one of the active participants in one such conspiracy was a Lutheran pastor named Dietrich Bonhöffer, a man whose well-known pacifist convictions and sense of dignity seemed unsuited to the treachery of an assassination plot. The metamorphosis from young theologian to Confessing Church activist to informant and conspirator against Hitler remains a provocative inquiry, and ultimately raises important questions of responsibility within a Christian framework.

Born in 1906, Bönhofer was the youngest of eight children. His family enjoyed considerable prestige, residing in a well-to-do suburb of Berlin. Dietrich's father, Karl Bonhöffer, was an esteemed neurologist and chaired the first psychiatry department at the University of Berlin. Dietrich's brothers were to achieve prominence as well. Karl-Friedrich became a physicist at the University of Leinzig, and Klaus became an executive with Lufthansa. His twin sister Sabine married Gerhard Leibholz, a constitutional lawyer who later became
a jurist in the Federal Republic. In examining most works on Bonhoeffer, one is struck by the intense unity and cooperation that his family shared. The significance of the closeness of the Bonhoeffer family was that it provided Dietrich with a firm foundation of support in the trials to come.

Bonhoeffer's decision to enter theological school was a break with tradition in his family. Although brought up in a religious background, Bonhoeffer did not have the ancestry of pastors and theologians characteristic of Barth's and Niemoller's families. Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's biographer, believes that the experience of World War I, particularly the death of his brother Walter, led Bonhoeffer to consider the ministry.\(^1\) Bonhoeffer entered the theological school at Tübingen in 1923, where he was attracted to the teachings of liberal theologians such as Adolf von Harnack and Adolf Schlatter. It was at this time that Bonhoeffer saw his first and last military experience. Military training of students, despite its dubious legality, was a common practice in Germany during the 1920's; Bonhoeffer himself served with the Ulm Rifles of the so-called "Black Reichswehr." Although Bonhoeffer is said to have enjoyed the experience, he was dismayed by the "very reactionary" tendencies shared by most trainees.\(^2\)

Travel was a significant element of Bonhoeffer's life. New perceptions and convictions often emerged from his visits abroad. One such visit was a journey to Rome in 1924, while he was still
a student; this experience awakened his interest in the concept of the "church." After completing his studies at the University of Berlin, Bonhoeffer became an assistant pastor to a German community in Barcelona, which added greatly to his experience in practical counseling and preaching. In 1930, Bonhoeffer visited the United States as a Sloan Fellow. Here he sought to explain the theology of Barth, whom he now regarded as responsible for changing his perceptions of theology. In addition, he showed great interest in American cultural life, particularly that of blacks.

Returning to Germany in 1931, Bonhoeffer became a Privatdozent (one who lectures without remuneration) at the University of Berlin. From all accounts, he was a very popular speaker. Bonhoeffer also made his first contact with Barth, attending several of his lectures and regretting that he had not met him sooner. In these few years before the 1933 crisis in Germany, Bonhoeffer made his first contacts with a growing ecumenical movement; the ties he established here would be quite valuable in the later resistance and conspiracy. Very shortly, Hitler's coming to power would become a turning point in his life, and the next twelve years would be the chronicle of this pastor's attempt to rid Germany of the blight of National Socialism.

One who investigates the life of Bonhoeffer cannot escape the impact of Bethge's work. An intimate friend and fellow pastor, Bethge provides a wealth of information in his definitive
In addition, Bethge has written an abridged biography entitled *Costly Grace* and edited Bonhoeffer's prison letters. Other biographers acknowledge their debt to Bethge but add their own interpretations and sometimes, unusual formats (for instance, Theodore Gill's book is written as a movie script). Histories of the church struggle are useful to some degree, but not in the same manner as they are for Barth and Niemöller, since Bonhoeffer's significant actions occurred relatively late and were well outside the mainstream of church activities. These sources are useful in compiling a synopsis of Bonhoeffer's views on National Socialism, the Jewish Question, and resistance.

**Bonhoeffer and National Socialism**

Like Niemöller, Bönhoffer exhibited a strong sense of patriotism and pride in Germany. But unlike his colleague, Bonhoeffer was not deceived by the Nazi program. Almost immediately after Hitler became chancellor, he vocally expressed his concern for Germany and his disgust with the distortions and lies of an oppressive regime.

Gill has described Bonhoeffer as "a vocally proud and grateful child of Germany and a champion of his misunderstood nation." Clearly his upper-class background instilled in him a sense of dignity for his nation. Like many other Germans, the Bonhoeffer's endured the hardships of World War I, losing relatives and a
member of their own family. Dietrich was personally enraged by the provisions of the Versailles Treaty; when he visited New York in 1930, he went "with a notebook full of arguments against the...treaty..., ready to do battle with anybody on the question of German war guilt."\(^6\)

Just as Niemöller accepted National Socialism as a way of restoring the monarchial prestige of Germany, Bonhoeffer rejected it because of its inability to measure up to his ideals:

It was aristocratic horror at this vulgarization of his Germany; it was contempt for the trash that presumed now to be responsible for a superb cultural inheritance. Then as the scabrous outlines of the new regime became clearer, there was added to Dietrich's disgust his anxiety for beloved people.\(^7\)

Dietrich was not the only member of his family to express dissatisfaction; the Bonhöffers were united in their mistrust of Hitler. Karl Bönhofffer recounted:

From the start, the victory of National Socialism in 1933...was in our view a misfortune--the whole family agreed on this. In my own case, I disliked and mistrusted Hitler because of his demagogic propaganda methods... because of what I heard from professional colleagues about his psychopathic symptoms.\(^8\)

Abercrombie also refers to Bonhoeffer's upper-class background as being a prime cause of his rejection of Hitler, but adds a theological perspective. He believes that Bönhofffer considered the ideal of social order and discipline to be of utmost importance. These ideals were based on the proper relation between God and man, superior and subordinate. Nazi ideology represented the very antithesis of this concept, since degenerate and undisciplined men were controlling the state.\(^9\)
We have already seen how Barth ascribed paganistic qualities to National Socialism. Bonhoeffer approached the religious nature of the Hitler regime in a slightly different manner—he often perceived the Führer as an agent of Satan, a man who threatened the entire nation by his presence. Bishop George Bell claims that Bonhoeffer went so far as to call Hitler the Antichrist, although this statement has been discredited by Bethge. Such a danger, according to Bonhoeffer, had to be removed despite the cost; the destruction of human values and dignity could not be tolerated. The Nazi state had come to serve Satan by demanding worship that rightfully belonged to God. Eventually, Bonhoeffer would sacrifice his own reputation to combat the evil that continued unchecked.

Bonhoeffer made his first public statement on National Socialism only two days after Hitler became chancellor. This radio address, broadcast in Berlin, marked him immediately as an opponent of the Third Reich. Entitled "Changes in the Concept of the Führer," it implored the audience to avoid the "narcissistic lures" and "idolatry" of the Nazis. Inexplicably, the broadcast was cut off; whether it was censored by the government or whether he had simply overrun his time limit is still unclear. But the unfavorable reaction encountered by the pastor made him vulnerable to future government harassment.

In the ensuing months, Bonhoeffer became active in the growing church resistance. He aided Niemöller in several activities, including the organization of the Pastors' Emergency
League. But his increasing dissatisfaction with Nazi policies, particularly anti-Semitic ones, caused him to leave Germany. During the next two years, he served as pastor to various German-speaking congregations. While in England, he achieved two important results. First, he was able to persuade the parishes in London to support the Confessing Church, which was a tremendous victory for that struggling body in that it began to receive recognition in ecumenical circles. Secondly, he befriended Bishop Bell of Chichester, who was extremely influential in his own country and in certain circles abroad. Bell would become an important figure in promoting international support that would be invaluable in later years.

A continuing source of irritation to the Nazis was Bonhoeffer's participation in ecumenical councils. Such journeys to world councils, particularly those at Sophia and Fanö, were viewed by the Nazis as subversive missions. It is true that Bonhoeffer expressed his desire for a public rejection of the Aryan Clause, and pressed the members of the Sophia conference to condemn anti-Semitism. Partly due to Bonhoeffer's efforts, a resolution was passed that flatly rejected the National Socialist practices. Moreover, his international friendships fostered a better understanding of the true situation in Germany. In presenting an insider's view of the church situation, Bonhoeffer was able to uncover the deceptions that the Nazi press used to disguise the internal problems.
The years following his return from London have been described by Bönhoffer as the "most fulfilled time of my life." His activities were mainly concerned with the instruction of seminary students. Operating a rather makeshift, clandestine school at Finkenwalde, the young pastor won a devoted following. Subjected to increasingly stringent regulations and harassment, though, the seminary operated for only two years before being closed by the Gestapo in 1937. Bönhöffer found himself under increasing scrutiny; the following year he was forbidden to enter Berlin, although this restriction was later relaxed through the influence of his parents. His adamantly refusal to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler made his position even more tenuous, especially when it became binding and retroactive for all pastors appointed since 1933. It was becoming increasingly clear to Bönhöffer that any attempts at appeasing Hitler would be doomed to failure. Elements of organized resistance, such as the Confessing Church, were losing their will to confront National Socialism. Bönhöffer's final resolution of this problem was political conspiracy.

Class background and religious attitudes were the critical factors in Bönhöffer's life that led him to reject National Socialism. Particularly in the international sphere, he fused diplomacy and righteous indignation to create a favorable atmosphere for the Confessing Church. Although Bönhöffer did not enjoy the prestige or recognition of Barth or Niemöller, he was an invaluable participant in the church struggle. His
outspoken convictions, tireless efforts, and pastoral skills were badly needed at a time when opposition to Hitler required the resolution Bonhoeffer possessed.

**Bonhoeffer and the Jewish Question**

Bethge states that Bonhoeffer "may have been the first to see this matter [the Jewish question] as the crucial problem in the impending struggle." Even more than Barth, Bonhoeffer saw the persecution of Jews as a nefarious practice and deplored the precepts of racial superiority. He wrote frequently on the subject, and some of his sharpest statements were written early in the struggle. Indeed, few church leaders were as willing as Bonhoeffer to speak out boldly against a practice that was tacitly conconed by many Germans.

Personal ties deeply affected Bonhoeffer's sympathetic attitude toward Jews. In particular, the plight of his brother-in-law, Gerhard Leibholz, and his friend Franz Hildebrandt brought home the seriousness of the situation. Leibholz, who was eventually dismissed from his post in 1935, was forced to flee with his family to England. Hildebrandt, a theologian who worked closely with Bonhoeffer in earlier days, served with him during his London pastorate. In 1937, Hildebrandt was arrested for his "subversive" association with Niemöller. Undoubtedly, Bonhoeffer's anxiety for their welfare, as well as the disgust he felt about legal constraints placed on all Jews, caused him to perceive the problem of anti-Semitism as a critical issue.
Bonhöffer was constantly battling the complacency of church leaders who wished to sidestep responsibility for Jews. Shortly after the one-day boycott of Jewish merchants in April 1933, Bonhöffer wrote an essay that expressed his concept of church responsibility toward Jews. As one might expect, Bonhöffer spoke of aiding the victims of a repressive government in a Christ-like manner. But the unusual and somewhat startling feature of this essay was its apparent call for direct action against such an oppressor. Likening National Socialism to a rolling wheel which crushed everything in its path, Bonhöffer urged the church "not simply to bind the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel, but also to put a spoke in the wheel itself."¹⁶ How Bonhöffer intended this spoke to be implemented is still not clear, but it should suffice to say that few individuals were willing to make such a strong public defense of the Jews.

Bonhöffer also had disputes with Confessing Church leaders on the Jewish question. As the Aryan Clause began to gain acceptance in several synods, Bonhöffer believed that schism was necessary to preserve the integrity of the church elements opposed to Hitler. This idea was opposed by Barth, who believed reform should come from within. Bonhöffer defended his position in a letter to his mentor:

You have stated that any Church which introduced the Aryan Clauses ceases thereby to be a Christian Church.... I ask you in the name of many friends, ministers, and students to let us know whether you consider it possible to remain in a Church which has ceased to be a Christian church....¹⁷
Bonhoeffer also had disagreements with Niemöller over the significance of the Jewish persecutions. According to Bethge, Niemöller did not consider anti-Semitism a major issue and refused to take a hard line, much to Bonhoeffer's dismay.13 Frustration stemming from irresolution such as Niemöller's was a major factor in Bonhoeffer's decision to leave for England.

Finally, it should be stated that Bonhoeffer was active in helping Jewish émigrés. While serving as pastor in London, he established a special collection for relief of refugees in England.14 In 1938, through family connections, he was able to learn of imminent measures against the Jews. Realizing the danger that his sister Sabine and family faced by remaining in Germany, he assisted their escape to Switzerland. Through the efforts of Bishop Bell, the Leibholzes were able to find employment and adjust to life in exile. After Bonhoeffer became involved in the conspiracy, he played a role in the "U-7 plot." Originally designed to help seven Jewish citizens (the number soon swelled beyond the original seven) find refuge in Switzerland, this plan depended on skillful deception of Gestapo personnel to facilitate their escape. Although the plan was successful, it was eventually discovered by the Gestapo and used as evidence against Bonhoeffer in his 1943 trial.20

Of the three pastors examined, Bonhoeffer perhaps devoted the most attention to the Jewish question. For him, this concern
was more than an abstract principle that should be defended; it was a realization of the hardships it posed for the ones he loved. Bonhöffer extended this concern to speak for all Jews suffering under Hitler, and sought to aid their safety and material needs. Gill summed up Bonhöffer's concern thusly: "Concreteness is not where Bonhöffer comes out in his theology; it is where he goes in." 21

Bonhöffer and Resistance

In many ways, one may consider Bonhöffer's role in resisting Hitler to be of prime importance in assessing his importance in the church struggle. Had he opposed the Nazis in a defensive or passive manner, as Barth and Niemöller chose to do, it is doubtful that Bonhöffer would have achieved any fame outside his native Germany. But it was precisely his decision to go beyond resistance and enter active conspiracy that makes his story unique. For Bonhöffer, conspiracy was the last hope Germany had for destroying the evil that could lead to total ruin.

At first, Bonhöffer sided with a great majority of church leaders on how to oppose Hitler. Resistance, if it were to occur at all, should be fought on theological grounds. But Bonhöffer quickly grew dissatisfied with this position, for injustices occurring outside of the church were being ignored. Indifferent reaction to Jewish persecutions particularly frustrated him. Gradually, Bonhöffer realized that opposition
within the church was too limited and self-centered to be effective. As a result, resistance became a more appealing option, especially in light of the growing ineffectiveness of the Confessing Church.

During the pre-war years, Bonhoeffer employed various strategies to resist the Hitler regime. Of greatest importance were his public speeches and writings. Uncompromising in tone, they brought attention to Nazi injustices. The previously mentioned radio address on the Führerprinzip, as well as Bonhoeffer's appeal to place "a spoke in the wheel" would serve to illustrate this point. Bonhoeffer's activities in the Pastors' Emergency League and in economical circles also demonstrated a capacity for resistance. One tactic of resistance that was uniquely Bonhoeffer's was the idea of a church strike or interdict. Under this plan, ministers would protest the restrictions placed on the church by refusing to conduct clerical duties, most importantly that of funeral services. Scoffed at as being impractical in 1933, this idea of a general strike was used nine years later in Norway with a surprising degree of success.

By the year 1939, Bonhoeffer, like many of his contemporaries, felt that war was inevitable. Despite frequent travel, he felt compelled to remain close to events in Germany. The lure of teaching posts abroad was tempting, but he could not feel comfortable about weathering the storm in relative safety while others suffered. He wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr, "I would have no right to take part in the restoration of Christian life in
Germany after the war if I did not share with my nation the
trials of the present time." The sacrifice of his own comfort
for the sake of his fellow countrymen epitomizes his belief of
acting as Christ would, "for others."

During this time, Bonhoeffer was approached by members of
his family about participating in the burgeoning plot to remove
Hitler. Undoubtedly, the decision was agonizing for him because
it would require the repudiation of deep-rooted pacifistic tenets.
Indeed, violence was something long abhorred by Bonhoeffer.
Speaking at the Panô conference in 1934, he declared that Chris-
tians "may not use weapons against one another because they
know that in so doing they are aiming those weapons at Christ
himself." And when asked by a student what he would do if war
broke out, Bonhoeffer replied, "I pray God will give me the
strength not to take up arms." At various times during his
life, he made plans to journey to India with the purpose of
studying political pacifism under Mohandas Gandhi. More pressing
matters, however, forced him to shelve this idea several times.

Abercrombie also indicates that there may have been a
theological conflict in Bonhoeffer's decision to enter the
conspiracy. On the one hand, Bonhoeffer saw the Christian
community as one existing in the world. Its mission was to
proclaim Christ, and to resist Satan's attempts to subvert this
mission. On the other hand, Bonhoeffer's Lutheran background
placed an emphasis on the sovereignty of God. Accordingly, all governments were subject to His lordship and served His ends. Therefore, any type of resistance, despite its ostensibly good intentions, would go against God's will. Abercrombie believes the conflict was never resolved in Bonhöffer's writings, and thus the dilemma remains.  

Yet Bonhöffer proceeded to begin what he called "the great masquerade of evil." By this stage of his thinking, he had decided it was time to step further from his role of passive resistor to that of active participant in removing Hitler. Bethge remarks:

It seemed to him appropriate in a situation into which a presumptuous German had maneuvered his country...that the patriot had to perform what in normal times is the action of a scoundrel. "Treason" had become true patriotism, and what was normally patriotism had become treason.

In a speech at Wayne State University, Jill stated:

This, at least, is how I interpret Bonhoeffer's turning to the Abwehr conspiracy. He had done his best to resist within the church by keeping its gospel pure. But at last he saw that even the Confessing Church was only a great nuisance to the state, and he wearied of keeping its hymn in tune. He went to people who wanted action.

But how did Bonhöffer reconcile these plans with his pacifistic and theological tenets? Essentially, he thought that he would have to subordinate his own beliefs--even his own pastoral reputation--for the sake of removing the oppressive evil that Hitler stood for. He believed it was necessary to separate
the Nazi machinery from his own beloved Germany. His action, however, treacherous it may have appeared, was an extension of his concern for the future of Germany.

Through his connections with his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, Bonhoeffer was introduced into the company of several high-ranking officers, namely General Ludwig Beck of the German General Staff and Admiral Walter-Vilhelm Canaris and General Hans Oster of the military intelligence staff (Abwehr).

Frightened by what they considered irresponsible, even catastrophic, rule by Hitler, these men secretly plotted measures to eliminate the Führer. As part of this scheme, Bonhoeffer was given a commission in the Abwehr. Ostensibly, he was assigned the task of gathering information and serving as an informer; in reality, he would be trying to drum up support for the resistance movement in other countries. His first assignment was gathering information in East Prussia. While there, the Gestapo issued an order forbidding him from preaching and requiring him to report all future movements. General Oster used his influence to have the latter restriction removed, yet this clash with the Gestapo was a foreshadowing of the trouble that would eventually expose the conspiracy.

During the next three years, the intrigue of Bonhoeffer's secret journeys continued. His assignments led him into Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden. In Norway, Bonhoeffer and fellow agents were sent to investigate a civil disturbance and
strike. There they secretly urged the Norwegians to persist in creating problems. During the Swedish visit, he unexpectedly encountered Bishop Bell. From this visit, Bell was able to obtain names and information about the German Resistance movement. He then presented the information to Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, who politely refused to consider any aid to such groups because there had been no evidence of overt resistance. Perhaps the most risky plots Bonhoeffer was involved with were two assassination attempts in February and March of 1943. An officer named Fabian von Schlabrendorff placed an explosive on Hitler's plane, which, for reasons never determined, failed to detonate. The next month, Major R. F. Gersdorff attempted to sacrifice his own life as a sort of "walking bomb" during the Fuhrer's visit to an arsenal. Unexpectedly, Hitler stayed only briefly, and the major was unable to get close enough to explode the device. Despite the failure of these missions, the Abwehr was able to cover its tracks sufficiently, and Bonhoeffer and his fellow conspirators were able to escape danger.

It was the long-standing rivalry between the Gestapo and the Abwehr over the control of information that led to the conspirators' undoing. Conflict and jealousy were frequent between Admiral Canaris and the S.S. leaders of the Reich Security Head Office; as a result, the Gestapo attempted to find any evidence of wrongdoing that would damage the Abwehr. On
rather dubious charges of irregularities involving a currency exchange, the Gestapo arrested Dohnanyi, and a few hours later, Bonhöffer himself. The evidence against them was not damning, but a thorough investigation of Dohnanyi's papers in 1944 revealed a documented report of the atrocities of the Hitler regime. In this "chronicle of shame" were the names of several conspirators and a summary of their activities since the first inklings of the plot in 1938. It was this document that proved to be a decisive factor in breaking the authority of the Abwehr and was a virtual death warrant that led to the execution of Beck, Canaris, and Oster.

Bonhöffer was imprisoned at Tegel during much of 1943-1944. In addition to gaining the friendship of many inmates, he wrote extensively on his ideas for a "religionless" Christianity, urging believers to abandon religious customs and to behave as Christ would if He lived in contemporary times. In early 1944 he was given a trial during which he was able to defend himself against the Gestapo allegations; the subsequent finding of the Dohnanyi documents unfortunately indicated his role in the conspiracy. He was transferred to the Gestapo in Prinz Albrecht Strasse, and from there to the concentration camp at Buchenwald. On April 9, 1945, he was executed at a Gestapo camp in Flossenbarg.
Practicality was at the very heart of Bonhöffer's theology. Church leaders who fought only to preserve the inviolability of their own positions disillusioned him. To Bonhöffer, such attitudes were selfish and hypocritical. It was wrong for the church to ignore the inherent evil of anti-Semitism and political persecution. Bonhöffer's decision to enter the Abwehr was an agonizing one, for it required the abandonment of reputation and personal principles. But, to Bonhöffer, a refusal to do anything about the growing evil of National Socialism would make a mockery of his Christian witness. Ultimately, this conviction would cost Bonhöffer his life. He was truly a man who "practiced what he preached."
In aiding the mission of the Confessing Church, Niemoller, Barth, and Bonhoffer worked tirelessly. Although their clerical training was similar in many respects, these men utilized unique skills and talents that made their roles particularly valuable. In their aggregate sum, these talents gave the Confessing Church a semblance of balance and completeness.

Niemoller can be perceived as a sort of public relations man. His status as war hero lent considerable prestige to his position. The masses who came to hear him obviously felt comfortable with his unquestionable integrity and patriotism. Sermons, not abstruse theological writings, were Niemoller's principal tool. Simple and direct in content, they were readily understood and greatly appreciated by the laity. In commanding grass roots support and loyalty, Niemoller was without peer.

Barth provided the intellectual and theological underpinning of the movement. Keenly perceptive of the dangers of National Socialism, he urged church leaders to resist its practices. As author of such influential documents as *Theologische Existenz heute* and the Barmen Confession, Barth defined the essence of the church struggle for the entire world.

While he was active in the Confessing Church, Bonhöffer played the role of diplomat and teacher. His influence in ecumenical circles was necessary in providing international support for the Confessing Church.
After his return to Germany in 1935, Bonhöffer operated a clandestine seminary at Finkenwalde. A very popular teacher, Bonhöffer won his students' devotion and gratitude.

Of course, there were important differences that separated these three individuals. Many of these differences have been discussed--class differences, political leanings, perceptions of the proper relationship between church and state, and considerations of the Christian's responsibility in a hostile environment. It is not surprising, then, to find incidents of personal clashes.

Upon meeting Niemöller for the first time, Barth was dismayed by the pastor's "Prussian" qualities. Niemöller and Bonhöffer had disputes over the significance of the Jewish question. In addition, Bonhöffer was displeased by Niemöller's congratulatory telegram to the Führer, noting in his diary that Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations "has brought the danger of war very much closer." Barth and Bonhöffer were both prone to disputes over theological issues, especially during the final years of their relationship.

The urgency of the situation, however, forced these men to relegate such differences to a minor role. Realizing the need for presenting a strong front against the Nazis, Barth, Niemöller, and Bonhöffer developed strong ties of cooperation. In a remark to Niemöller, "You haven't the least idea what theology is all about, and yet how can
I complain? For you think and see and do the right things!" Eventually, these men became the most uncompromising of the elements of church opposition. They paid a high price for their convictions: exile, imprisonment, and, in Bonhoeffer's case, death.

It is significant to note that the reputation and influence of Niemoller, Barth, and Bonhoeffer increased tremendously in the post war era. Niemoller was instrumental in the drafting of the Stuttgart Statement of Guilt, which was an admission of the church's failure to resist Hitler wholeheartedly. He later served as president of the World Council of Churches. Barth became a significant advocate of nuclear disarmament and was widely honored for his achievements in theology. Bonhoeffer became a twentieth-century martyr whose writings still create tremendous impact. Books such as *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*, highly regarded in both theological and secular circles, have made Bonhoeffer one of the most influential theologians of recent times.

Had all Protestants responded to the church struggle in the manner of Niemoller, Barth, and Bonhoeffer, the outcome of the *Kirchenkampf* may very well have been different. Despite diverse backgrounds and attitudes, these men were united in their unflinching defiance of National Socialism. Unfortunately, their followers were few and divided. In the final analysis, the lives of these three men stand as models for what effective church resistance might have been.
Notes

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9 Niemöller, From U-Boat to Pulpit, p. 97.

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17 Ibid.
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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 102.
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23 Ibid., p. 313.

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Conclusion

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3 Casalis, Portrait of Barth, p. 66.


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